

Department of Human Services

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DHS Office of
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Articles in Today's Clips Tuesday, February 13, 2007

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Foster mom accused in death is a 'victim'

Minister: Charges a result of politics

February 13, 2007

BY JACK KRESNAK

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

A group of ministers said Monday that a former foster mother charged with manslaughter in the death of a 2-year-old boy in her Detroit home is "the victim of public anger against the foster-care system."

The National Action Network Leaders -- headed locally by the Revs. Charles Williams, Maurice L. Rudds and Horace L. Sheffield III, who pastor churches in Detroit -- held a news conference Monday at the Frank Murphy Hall of Justice, shortly before a court appearance by Charles Adams-Rogers. Adams-Rogers is charged in the Aug. 16 beating death of 2-year-old Isaac Lethbridge.

Williams called the charges against Adams-Rogers, who also is an ordained minister, "politically motivated," saying authorities have "charged only one person out of the foster-care system as a whole" in Isaac's death.

Adams-Rogers is charged with involuntary manslaughter and second- and fourth-degree child abuse in the beating death of Isaac and physical abuse of his 4-year-old sister under the theory that, as a licensed foster parent, she was responsible for any harm that may have come to the children in her care.

Previously, Adams-Rogers blamed her 12-year-old adopted daughter, a girl with serious behavioral and psychological problems, in the boy's death. The girl has not been charged with any offense.

Adams-Rogers' lawyer, Warren Harris, said it is wrong to hold Adams-Rogers responsible for Isaac's death by blunt force trauma if someone else killed him.

As she has from the beginning, Adams-Rogers said Monday that Isaac's death was an accident and that "I did everything possible to protect the children in my home."

Contact **JACK KRESNAK** at 313-223-4544 or jkresnak@freepress.com.

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Published February 12, 2007

Murderer's parental rights terminated

Midday update

By Kevin Grasha
Lansing State Journal

The Lansing man convicted earlier this month of killing his 13-month-old stepdaughter today voluntarily gave up parental rights to his infant biological daughter.

Steve Lee Moy, 39, was convicted Feb. 2 of first-degree felony murder and child abuse in connection with Anishia Moy's death in August 2006. He will be sentenced next month to life in prison without the possibility of parole.

In mid-November 2006, Steve Moy's 21-year-old wife, Loretta, gave birth to a girl fathered by Steve. That child was removed from Loretta's care days after she was born and is temporarily in the custody of the state Department of Human Services.

Also today, Ingham County Circuit Judge Richard Garcia told Loretta Moy that her three-month-old child could be permanently taken away from her, saying: "If it is found you are not able to provide safe and proper housing, your parental rights could be terminated."

Another hearing in the case is scheduled for next month.

Read more about this story in Tuesday's State Journal.

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Published February 13, 2007

Slain baby's mom loses rights over 2nd infant

Woman admits home unfit for 3-month-old daughter

By Kevin Grasha
Lansing State Journal

The mother of a slain 13-month-old girl, whose husband was convicted of abusing and killing the child, admitted Monday in family court her home is unfit for the couple's infant daughter.

What's next

- At a March 14 hearing, Ingham County Probate Judge Richard Garcia is expected to order steps Loretta Moy will be required to follow before it can be determined whether she can regain custody of her child, who is now 3 months old.
- Steve Lee Moy, who was convicted of first-degree felony murder and first-degree child abuse in the death of his wife Loretta Moy's 13-month-old daughter, will be sentenced March 7 to life in prison without the possibility of parole.

Saying there was evidence of neglect as well as criminality, Ingham County Probate Judge Richard Garcia ruled the court would take legal authority over Loretta and Steve Moy's 3-month-old daughter.

Garcia then told Loretta Moy, 21, her daughter could be permanently taken away from her, saying: "If it is found you are not able to provide safe and proper housing, your parental rights could be terminated."

Also Monday, Steve Lee Moy - who has been convicted of murder in the August 2006 death of his stepdaughter Anishia - voluntarily gave up his parental rights.

Steve Moy, 39, is scheduled to be sentenced next month to life in prison without the possibility of parole.

In November 2006, while Steve Moy was in jail awaiting trial, Loretta gave birth to a baby girl fathered by him. That child was removed from Loretta's care days after she was born and has been placed with the state Department of Human Services.

According to court records, several complaints of neglect have been made against Loretta, including that Loretta's aunt was seen smacking Anishia while Loretta and Steve were living with the aunt and her boyfriend, a registered sex offender.

Loretta also left Anishia - when she was 1 month old - in the care of her biological mother, whose parental rights to Loretta had been terminated.

During Steve Moy's trial, Loretta testified she was not aware of dozens of bruises a forensic pathologist said Anishia suffered days or weeks before she died or fractures to the child's arm and wrist that had healed.

At Monday's hearing, with her husband seated nearby wearing a yellow jail jumpsuit, Loretta again denied knowing about the injuries.

"You were not aware she had suffered broken bones?" Garcia asked.

"I did not notice," she said.

Loretta said she knew about a bite wound on Anishia's cheek caused by another child as well as a blister on one of her fingers, which she could not explain.

Another hearing is scheduled in March, during which the court is expected to order steps the DHS wants Loretta to follow before it can be determined whether she can regain custody of her 3-month-old daughter.

If it is found Loretta does not benefit from services requested by the DHS, the agency could file a petition to terminate her parental rights.

Contact Kevin Grasha at 267-1347 or kgrasha@lsj.com.

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Slain girls had history of neglect, records say

February 13, 2007

BY CHRISTY ARBOSCELLO

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

When deputies checked on Jennifer Kukla's daughters five years ago, the girls were covered with scratches and bruises from each other, lacked supervision, were living in filth and hadn't been bathed for days, according to court records obtained Monday by the Free Press.

The girls were temporarily removed from the home in the 18200 block of Millstone in Macomb Township, then returned to their mother about five months later when the petition was dismissed.

Last week, investigators found Alexandra, 8, and Ashley, 5, dead with multiple stab wounds in their mobile home at 21262 Chevalier in Macomb Township. Jennifer Kukla was charged with two counts of first-degree murder.

The Feb. 23, 2002, visit from Macomb County sheriff's deputies led to the removal of the girls -- then ages 3 and 1. They became temporary wards of the court based on charges of neglect against their mother.

The file also shows Kukla had been warned twice before the deputies' visit about her living conditions.

She is scheduled for a preliminary exam Thursday in Shelby Township.

Prosecutors say their case will focus on the slayings and not the history of neglect.

Court-appointed defense lawyer Steven Freers said he likely would first seek a competency exam of his client.

*A crisis professional will offer parents of girls' classmates tips to help kids cope, 7 tonight at Ojibwa Elementary, 46950 Heydenreich. Contact **CHRISTY OYAMA-ARBOSCELLO** at 586-469-8085 or arboscello@freepress.com.*

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WZZM13 ONLINE - ABC TELEVISION for ALL OF WEST MICHIGAN

Update: Woman waves prelim after children left in car

John Bumgardner

Created: 2/12/2007 6:36:38 PM
Updated: 2/12/2007 7:20:43 PM

 [Click here to play video](#)

Montcalm County - The Montcalm County woman accused of leaving her 3 children in a truck for over 3 hours while she was inside a store, has waived her preliminary hearing.

Elizabeth Dillon, 28 is charged with 2nd degree child abuse, that's a 4-year felony.

She's accused of leaving her 6-year-old twins and 2-year-old child in her pick-up truck while she was in a saddle shop in downtown Lowell.

Police say they found the children unharmed, but the youngest child had wet her pants and car seat.

Dillon's case now moves on to circuit court.

Web Editor: [John Bumgardner](#), Assignment Desk



Elizabeth Dillon

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Retired vice officer sentenced to prison for buying child porn

February 12, 2007

By DAVID ASHENFELTER
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

A 57-year-old retired Detroit vice squad officer got a hard lesson today about buying child pornography.

Michael Lazo Mihal of Detroit, was sentenced to 3 1/2 years in prison for possession of child pornography. He was indicted last year for buying \$9,000 worth of videotapes from a notorious Florida pornographer who recorded sex acts with 120 children during travels to Cuba and Ecuador.

“Without a purchaser, you don’t have a seller,” U.S. District Judge Nancy Edmunds told Mihal, rejecting pleas for leniency from his lawyers, who said he suffers from an illness he battled for many years.

Attorneys William Mitchell III and Gregory Fisher Lord wanted Edmunds to sentence Mihal below the 33- to 41-month range recommended by federal sentencing guidelines. Assistant U.S. Attorney Saima Mohsin urged Edmunds to give Mihal 41 months in prison.

“I’m ashamed, I’m embarrassed, I’m disgusted with myself,” Mihal told Edmunds, adding that it was a relief when postal investigators showed up in 2003 to look for child pornography because it got his problem out into the open.

Mihal bought the tapes from Angel Mariscal, 48, of Miami Beach, Fla., who was sentenced by a federal judge in 2004 to 100 years in prison for producing and distributing child pornography.

Mariscal, who was HIV positive, recorded his sex acts with at least 120 children on trips abroad and sold them to U.S. customers like Mihal, who is among at least 44 people arrested or indicted in the case. Postal authorities found the customers through Mariscal’s records.

Mihal, who pleaded guilty in October, will report to prison within a few weeks.



Muskegon Chronicle

Scarves wrap foster kids in good feelings

Tuesday, February 13, 2007

By Judy Putnam

CHRONICLE LANSING BUREAU

A red scarf helped make Rachel Wall feel like there was a big family backing her up.

Wall, 18, a freshman at Baker College in Muskegon and a 2006 graduate of Hesperia High School, received a scarf, a package with treats and some practical items. The gift was sent by the Orphan Foundation of America, a Sterling, Va.,-based nonprofit group that provides scholarships and other support to help foster children go on to college or training after high school.

Included in Wall's package was a booklet on how to deal with adult issues such as health and auto insurance.

When most teens get into car accidents, they call their parents on their cell phone. When Wall got into a car accident last month, she turned to the booklet for advice. The extra support shown in the care packages is appreciated, she said.

"It made it seem like you were being cared for, and people want you to succeed," she said.

Each year about 500 Michigan foster children "age out," leaving the foster system without being adopted. Foster children are under the care of the state's child welfare system after suffering abuse or neglect.

Michigan children age out of the system between the ages of 18 and 20, after a judge considers their circumstances, said Maureen Sorbet, a spokeswoman for the Michigan Department of Human Services.

There are more than 18,000 foster children in Michigan, Sorbet said.

Nationally, only half of foster children graduate from high school, and fewer than one in every 10 go on to technical training or college after high school, according to the foundation.

Recognizing the roadblocks to an education, the foundation provides scholarships, e-mail mentors and a bit of moral support: It sends three care packages a year to students in their program, one at the beginning of the year, on Valentine's Day and at the end of the year.

The Valentine's Day gift includes a handknit scarf for the Red Scarf Project. Individual and groups across the country donate the scarves.

"These kids have unique challenges and unique hurdles because they are isolated and alone," said Annalisa Assaadi, national events coordinator for the foundation. "They really need someone to turn to to help make decisions."

The Orphan Foundation of American sent valentine packages to 3,000 colleges students, including 20 in Michigan. The program isn't as active here as it is in other states where it has a formal arrangement to administer federal funds for foster youth attending college, Assaadi said. But, she said, there's interest in working with more Michigan youth.

Wall said she was adopted at birth but placed in foster care at age 12 because of abuse. She lived in two foster homes.

Wall isn't alone in life. She sees her former foster family in Hesperia most weekends, and she shares an

apartment with her brother from her adoptive family.

Wall was studying to be a surgical technician, but is switching to nursing next year because of the abundant job opportunities.

She said she is determined to succeed -- and prove that foster kids can make it.

"I don't let my past experiences be an excuse to be an unsuccessful person. It's too easy for that to happen," she said.

Michigan State University freshman Natalie Kyles, a 19-year-old former foster child from Kalamazoo, appreciated her package as she opened it.

"Wow. There's a lot of stuff in here," she said.

Kyles, too, said she is determined to get a college education. She struggled with Spanish her first semester but passed her classes, earning 12 credits while working 20 hours a week. She is planning a career in law enforcement or the judiciary with the goal of helping foster children find decent homes.

Kyles said her childhood wasn't easy. She and her twin sister -- also a freshman at MSU but not participating in the Orphan Foundation program -- lived in six different homes growing up, and some were abusive. Her birth mother was just 15 when she was born, and her birth father is now in prison.

"I was lucky to have a personality where I took the negative things to motivate me to do better," Kyles said.

Still, she said she sometimes has a hard time concentrating on school because of her past troubles.

"I'm still dealing with a lot of issues that haven't been dealt with, and trying to bring some healing into my heart," she said.

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February 13, 2007

States and U.S. at Odds on Aid for Uninsured

By [ROBERT PEAR](#) and [RAYMOND HERNANDEZ](#)

WASHINGTON, Feb. 12 — In the absence of federal action, governors and state legislators around the country are transforming the nation's health care system, putting affordable health insurance within reach of millions of Americans in hopes of reversing the steady rise in the number of uninsured, now close to 47 million.

But the states appear to be on a collision course with the Bush administration, whose latest budget proposals create a huge potential obstacle to their efforts to expand coverage. While offering to work with states by waiving requirements of federal law, the Bush administration has balked at state initiatives that increase costs to the federal government.

State efforts have almost invariably begun with children, building on the Children's Health Insurance Program, which is jointly financed by the federal and state governments. Many states are eager to expand eligibility for that program, and some are going far beyond the income levels deemed appropriate by the White House. In his budget last week, President Bush said he wanted to return the program to its "original objective" of covering children with family incomes less than twice the poverty level.

Sixteen states already cover children in families with incomes above 200 percent of the poverty level, and some want to go higher, even as the president seeks to reduce federal payments for children in families with higher incomes.

In New York, Gov. [Eliot Spitzer](#), a Democrat, has proposed raising the state's income limit to 400 percent of the poverty level, from 250 percent. A family of four is considered poor if its annual income is less than \$20,650. Arizona and Wisconsin are also proposing raising income ceilings.

In California, as part of a plan to cover all state residents, Gov. [Arnold Schwarzenegger](#), a Republican, proposed increasing the income limit for the children's insurance program to 300 percent of the poverty level, from 250 percent.

Gov. [Rod R. Blagojevich](#) of Illinois, a Democrat, said Mr. Bush's proposal "would seriously hamper the efforts of Illinois and other states" to ensure that all children had coverage — the goal of a state law he signed in November 2005.

The movement to expand coverage is by no means limited to children any more.

The National Conference of State Legislatures has reported: "Health care reform was hot in legislatures across the nation in 2006, and the forecast for this session may be even hotter. Fueled by the increasing number of uninsured Americans, the declining number of employers offering insurance to their employees, the improved fiscal conditions in the states and the lack of federal action, states are leading the way in health care reform."

Officials cite a groundswell of state activity:

¶Arkansas, Kentucky, Montana, Oklahoma, Rhode Island and Tennessee have new laws and programs to reduce the cost of

insurance for small employers.

¶Massachusetts and Vermont passed laws in 2006 to achieve universal or nearly universal coverage, while addressing the cost and quality of care.

¶Several states, including Colorado and Delaware, are requiring insurers to cover young adults, the fastest-growing segment of the uninsured population.

“We have a goal that all Minnesotans should be covered by health insurance,” Gov. Tim Pawlenty, a Republican, said in an address to the State Legislature last month.

In New York State, the Children’s Health Insurance Program covers 385,000 children, of whom 55,000 have family incomes above 200 percent of the poverty level. Another 50,000 children would be eligible under Governor Spitzer’s proposal to increase the income ceiling.

The federal government now pays 65 percent of the cost of coverage for each child in New York’s program, or \$1,154 a year out of a cost of \$1,776. Judith Arnold, the program’s director, said Monday that under the president’s proposal, the federal contribution would be reduced by \$266 a child. So, she said, New York would lose \$14.6 million a year.

Knowing they cannot count on a major infusion of federal money, some states are looking to their own revenue sources, including tobacco taxes, pools of money set aside for charity care and uncompensated care, and assessments levied on employers who do not provide health benefits to their workers.

Gov. [Edward G. Rendell](#) of Pennsylvania, a Democrat, has proposed paying for coverage of the uninsured through a variety of new taxes, including an increase in the state’s tobacco tax.

Mr. Rendell also wants to levy a 3 percent assessment on the payrolls of businesses that do not offer coverage to their employees.

Similarly, under Governor Schwarzenegger’s proposal, businesses with 10 or more employees would have to offer insurance to their workers or pay 4 percent of their payroll into a state fund to be used for coverage.

State efforts face several potential pitfalls. The cost of coverage could spin out of control. An economic downturn could reduce states’ fiscal capacity. Moreover, a federal law, the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974, could block any state program that requires employers to alter their health plans.

In Washington, health policy debates highlight the ideological divide between Republicans and Democrats over the proper role of government in helping the uninsured. Governors and state legislators tend to be more pragmatic.

“There is such a political divide in Washington that many people believe that the only reasonable chance to succeed is at the state level,” said Jeffrey S. Crowley, a senior research scholar at the Health Policy Institute of [Georgetown University](#).

Soaring health costs are placing pressures on employers and employees alike. In recent weeks, companies like Wal-Mart have joined labor unions and consumer groups in coalitions espousing universal coverage.

In his State of the Union address on Jan. 23, Mr. Bush proposed a new tax deduction to help people buy health insurance outside the workplace, and he said he wanted to help “states that are coming up with innovative ways to cover the uninsured.”

In his budget, Mr. Bush said the way to transform the health care system was by “subsidizing the purchase of private insurance,” not by expanding public programs in a way that would increase costs to the federal government.

To slow the growth of Medicare and Medicaid, Mr. Bush asked Congress to squeeze tens of billions of dollars from the programs.

Mr. Bush’s efforts, combined with the flurry of state activity, have forced Congress to face fundamental questions about the Children’s Health Insurance Program: If states run out of money, should the federal government bail them out? Should states be allowed to use the money to cover adults?

More than a dozen states expect to exhaust their allotments of federal money in the next few months, raising the possibility that children will be removed from the rolls. Georgia and New Jersey, for example, said they would run out of money by May.

White House officials said that some states had strayed from the purpose of the program in another way, by covering adults. Mr. Bush wants to prohibit states from adding childless adults to the rolls. And he would restrict eligibility for parents.

Jason A. Helgeson, policy director for the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services, said, “There is strong empirical evidence that when you cover adults and children, you get more kids covered.” In Wisconsin, the Children’s Health Insurance Program covers 36,900 parents and 29,800 children, Mr. Helgeson said.

Senator [Orrin G. Hatch](#), Republican of Utah, asked: “What is going on here? When we created the program, its purpose was to provide coverage for low-income children.”

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Michigan Report

February 12, 2007

SAVINGS ON MEDICAID ESTATE RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION DIFFER

As part of her fiscal year 2007-2008 budget for the Department of Community Health, Governor Jennifer Granholm is once again proposing the state implement a Medicaid estate recovery program, but how much such a program would save to Michigan's coffers and whether those savings would end up being a wash when the state has to administer such a program is debatable.

Ms. Granholm's proposal states that an estate recovery program could net \$4.2 million in savings to Medicaid, which alone takes up 66 percent of DCH's \$11.5 billion annual budget.

Michigan is the only state that has not adopted a recovery program, which it can do under a provision in federal law that gives states a waiver if the program is not considered cost effective.

At a minimum, states with a recovery system have to collect what was spent on Medicaid for long-term care and related drug and hospital benefits, which include Medicaid payments for Medicare cost sharing related to those services, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. But states have the option of collecting for costs related to all Medicaid expenditures for an individual.

Under the governor's plan, all real and personal property subject to the state's probate law would be eligible for recovery.

"A state's ability to recover from probate estates depends in some measure on Medicaid's standing vis-a-vis other claimants. The order of payment of debt is established under state law. Mortgages, unpaid tax or public utility bills, child support arrears, burial costs, or other debts may be paid before the Medicaid lien and reduce the amount that is actually recovered. The State's standing is also influenced by locally determined state priorities. For example, some state laws protect the family home in an estate from some or all claims against it, including Medicaid claims," an April 2005 [report](#) from the federal department stated.

And states are prohibited under federal law from recovering costs "during the lifetime of the surviving spouse (no matter where he or she lives); from a surviving child who is under age 21, or is blind or permanently disabled (according to the SSI/Medicaid definition of "disability"), no matter where he or she lives; in the case of the former home of the recipient, when a sibling with an equity interest in the home has lived in the home for at least one year immediately before the deceased Medicaid recipient was institutionalized and has lawfully resided in the home continuously since the date of the recipient's admission and in the case of the former home of the recipient, when an adult child has lived in the home for at least two years immediately before the deceased Medicaid recipient was institutionalized, has lived there continuously since that time, and

can establish to the satisfaction of the State that he or she provided care that may have delayed the recipient's admission to the nursing home or other medical institution."

The Mackinac Center for Public Policy has [estimated](#) that Michigan could actually see a savings of up to \$85 million per year if it implemented an estate recovery system, which was based on collections nationally from 2004 that totaled \$362 million out of the \$45.8 billion spent on nursing home Medicaid recipients.

"Oregon had the second highest rate of collection at 5.8 percent, or \$13 million of its \$238 million Medicaid nursing home care bill. Given the \$1.7 billion Michigan spent on Medicaid nursing home care, a 5 percent recovery rate would save taxpayers \$85 million," wrote TaraLynn Velting, an estate attorney with Garan Lucow Miller in Grand Rapids and an adjunct scholar with the Mackinac Center.

In looking at the Oregon model, the federal department wrote, "Much of the original enthusiasm for mandatory estate recovery was based on the results in Oregon, where estate recovery was implemented in the 1940s as part of a comprehensive program to help senior citizens keep enough money to meet their own needs and protect their assets from unscrupulous uses by others. An extraordinary jump in Medicaid savings was predicted if all states were to follow the Oregon model. A more recent study estimates that one state (Nebraska) could increase Medicaid savings fivefold if it adopted all of Oregon's estate recovery practices.

"However, it is clear that the much-vaunted savings have not become a reality. In 2003, estate recoveries amounted to \$330 million, or 0.13% of total Medicaid spending in all states, with individual state collections ranging from 0.0 - 0.64 percent."

The concern that implementation of such a program could mean a wash for the state, or end up costing the state more simply because of the administrative duties that would accompany it, has [Rep. Bruce Caswell](#) (R-Hillsdale), the lead Republican of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Community Health, questioning what good such a program would do for the state at this point.

Mr. Caswell said it's easy to say the state is enacting such a program, but much harder for it to follow through by acquiring and selling the recipient's assets to have Medicaid repaid.

He said the state should first provide those who are 50 to 65 years of age with options in long-term care, which was facilitated by the approval of the Long-Term Care Partnership last session and a letter by Ms. Granholm to all senior citizens in the state, but that further options such as tax credits for people investing in their long-term care should also be enacted.

Once those are up and running and people have choices, then in five to six years the state could impose a recovery program, Mr. Caswell said.

Asked whether he thought the savings estimated by Ms. Granholm were too low or the Mackinac Center's were too high, Mr. Caswell said that based on what he's read that 15-20 states with an estate recovery don't make anything once administrative costs are considered, so he believed Ms. Granholm's estimation was closest to what Michigan might be able to expect.

Greg Bird, spokesperson for the State Budget Office, said, “We think the recovery figure from the Mackinac Center is very overstated. Obviously it depends on how aggressive a state is and their definition of who falls under a particular program. We researched other Midwest states (Illinois, Minnesota, Ohio, Indiana and Wisconsin) and their plans. We felt that following our research – and the past willingness by the Legislature to pass such a plan – that we would begin modestly.”

Mr. Bird said that in terms of administration, the DCH budget plans for one full-time employee to begin the program, with more possibly needed as the program comes online. DCH would be in charge of administering the program, but the Department of Attorney General would do the collections, he said.



Tapping health care

Tuesday, February 13, 2007

If you know Jackson County, you know that it is, on balance, a community with a poor health profile. Part of the problem is that many residents have no health insurance. So we're please to note that there is a new opportunity for Jackson County's uninsured to get the care they need.

It's called Project Access. For the past three years, some leaders in the human-services field have been developing the program, which has just begun taking applications at the Center for Family Health, Jackson County Community Foundation, United Way of Jackson County and Community Connections. (You can dial 211 from a land-line phone for information.)

Basically, Project Access seeks to provide free or low-cost health care to about 500 uninsured or low-income residents who do not qualify for public assistance. Unfortunately, it should not be difficult to find 500 such people, for organizers of the program estimate about 16,000 residents are eligible.

Eighty physicians have agreed to treat the patients for free. Dr. Brian Adamczyk found nearly every doctor he approached to be willing.

Coordination of the program is provided under a \$42,000 grant from the Jackson County Community Foundation.

Since at least 120 people have been involved in this project, the list of those to thank or applaud is long. Suffice it to say that this sort of program should provide its own pay-back (i.e. treating a cold is less costly than allowing it to blossom into pneumonia). When you succeed in getting hundreds of uninsured people to the doctor, you've done a very good thing.

-- Jackson Citizen Patriot

Wednesday: A statewide trans-fat ban, a new retail incubator

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Bill would let same-sex couples adopt in Michigan

February 12, 2007

By DAVID EGGERT

ASSOCIATED PRESS

LANSING — A Democratic state lawmaker introduced legislation today that would allow same-sex couples and other unmarried adults to jointly adopt children in Michigan.

State law has left children, including foster children, with just one legal parent, said Rep. Paul Condino of Southfield. He said the other parent can't make medical decisions and other choices for the child, causing serious problems if something happens to the legal parent.

"We are folks that are promoting children and taking care of the most vulnerable," said Condino, who was joined at news conferences in Detroit and Lansing by social workers, lawyers, an Episcopalian minister and other supporters of the bill.

The legislation could affect not only gay and lesbian couples but also unmarried adults such as siblings and grandparents. State law has been interpreted to allow only married couples to adopt jointly.

Backers complained that an adoptive parent with a terminal illness has to end his or her parental rights so another adult can adopt the child. They also said some adopted children have been sent back to foster care while legal complications are resolved.

"That child is left without protection," said Maxine Thome, executive director of the state chapter of the National Association of Social Workers. "Critical factors in a child's emotional and physical well-being are stability, love, safety and respect." Those factors are best assured when adoption is based on two adults' parenting abilities, not their marital status, Thome said.

"Same-sex parents who have made choices to have children are some of the most loving, committed, dedicated parents," she said.

The Michigan Catholic Conference, however, issued a statement today expressing concern with the legislation.

"Public policy in Michigan regarding adoption must be crafted within the framework of marriage and the traditional family structure," said Paul Long, the group's vice president for public policy. He said married couples provide the "optimal setting for the education and growth of children."

Gay and lesbian couples once were allowed to jointly adopt children in Washtenaw County. But the practice was stopped in 2002 after the county's chief judge said such adoptions violated state law.

Condino also introduced "second-parent" legislation in 2005, but it never got a hearing in the House, then controlled by Republicans. Democrats now control the House, and Condino — the chamber's Judiciary Committee chairman — plans a hearing in May.

It's unclear how the bill will fare in the House, even among Democrats. "Different (Democratic) caucus members are going to have different positions on the issue," said Dan Farough, spokesman for House Speaker Andy Dillon, D-Redford.

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CHILD ADVOCATES: SECOND PARENT ADOPTION IMPERATIVE

Unmarried couples should have the same rights to jointly adopt a child as married couples have, and legal parents who already have adopted a child should not have to relinquish their parental rights on their deathbed so that a relative can take care of their child, a group of child advocates said Monday in announcing their support for a House bill that would create second parent adoptions in Michigan.

[Rep. Paul Condino](#) (D-Southfield) is re-introducing a measure from last session in what will be [HB 4259](#), which grants two unmarried persons the right to jointly adopt a child in the state, as well as specifying that an existing legal parent would not need to terminate his or her rights in order to consent to a second person adopting the child.

There are approximately 17,000 children in Michigan's foster care system, of which 4,000 to 6,000 are eligible for adoption. The group said there was no estimation for how many of those children were placed into the state's care because of a situation in which they had only one legal parent, but that the legislation would open more doors for people looking to adopt in Michigan and therefore directly impact those 4,000 to 6,000 children.

"Study after study shows how important a safe, loving home with two stable parents is to children," Mr. Condino said. "While it would be ideal to hope that all of these parents would be married to each other, many adults do not or cannot marry for a variety of reasons. Their children should not bear the legal burden of this decision."

Antonio Grettenberger, a student at Lansing Community College, said he was legally adopted by one parent when he was 13 years old and while actually having two parents provided him with emotional stability, he didn't understand why the other parent in the couple couldn't do things like sign his school report card. A judge finally ruled when Mr. Grettenberger was a minor that both of his mothers could legally be his parents, but Mr. Condino said he was "one of the lucky ones."

A variety of differing court opinions on the matter is what led Mr. Condino to introduce the legislation, he said. As chair of the House Judiciary Committee, Mr. Condino said he would bring the bill up for a hearing on May 2.

The issue of second parent adoption has opened the lexicon of public discourse into whether gay couples should be allowed to adopt, particularly in wake of a 2004 ballot proposal that amended Michigan's Constitution to define marriage as being between one man and one woman. The Department of Attorney General has argued, with some courts affirming, that voters' passage of that proposal extends to health benefits given to same-sex partners by public entities.

The Department of Attorney General declined to comment on the legislation.

But William Long, an attorney and licensed social worker, said, “The key here is we are talking about support for children, not gay marriage. I don’t see the constitutional amendment conflicting at all.”

Mr. Long said under current law, apparent who has a will could designate someone to be his or her child’s guardian, but that is not the same as being a child’s legal parent in every respect and guardianship can be challenged in the courts.

And Maxine Thome, executive director of the National Association of Social Workers, said, “Recent research has shown that children raised by same-sex parents fare as well in all indicators such as grades, social and emotional well-being and responsibility, as those raised by opposite-sex parents. Whether or not individuals are married has not been proven to be an indicator of lasting relationships or an ability to parent. The ability for a second parent to adopt allows for greater security around decision-making, health benefits, emergency medical decisions, shared legal decisions and shared financial responsibility.”

The Michigan Catholic Conference wanted to wait to see specific wording in the legislation before commenting, said spokesperson Dave Maluchnik, but the Conference’s vice president for public policy Paul Long did say, “Public policy in Michigan regarding adoption must be crafted within the framework of marriage and the traditional family structure. While recognizing those married couples unable to bring children into their lives, the Michigan Catholic Conference believes the presence of a married mother and father is the optimal setting for the education and growth of children.”

Dawn Mead, a social worker in the Lansing area, said she believes the second parent adoption legislation would run cooperatively with the Department of Human Services’ Family-to-Family program.

“I have assisted numerous families where an unmarried person or grandparent has adopted a child only to have life situations change through death, illness or other circumstances. Children have lost access to health care, have reentered the foster care system and/or are left to fend for themselves,” she said, adding that under the legislation, a second parent would not have to go through the system to re-adopt their child through more fees and court visits.

Also in support of the legislation is the Michigan Women’s Commission, American Bar Association, American Psychiatric Association, American Psychoanalytic Association, Child Welfare League of America, North American Council of Adoptable Children, American Academy of Pediatrics along with 93 congregations in the Episcopal Diocese of Michigan.

Mr. Condino said the challenge ahead will be educating all 148 legislators on the legislation, though he said several have already come up to him to inquire about it and that the bill is part of a caucus agenda Democrats are looking to pass. Mr. Condino also said that Governor Jennifer Granholm is behind the legislation.



Couples pay, but don't get Wyandotte woman's baby

Woman charged in adoption fraud

February 13, 2007

BY NAOMI R. PATTON, DAWSON BELL and ZLATI MEYER

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITERS

For Christine and her husband, adopting a baby was the culmination of their hopes and dreams -- and Heather Roshelle Collins seemed to be the ideal birth mother.

But Collins defrauded them and two other would-be adoptive couples of thousands of dollars, authorities say, before giving her baby to a fourth couple.

"We were heartbroken ... to put all your hope into this ... it was awful," Christine said. Her last name is not being published because she and her husband have since adopted another child through an agreement requiring them and the birth mother to remain anonymous.

Collins, 33, of Wyandotte, was charged in 27th District Court on Friday with two counts of fraud charges on allegations she got financial aid from three couples who each expected to adopt her unborn child.

The couples officially learned they had been cheated after the child was born and adopted by a fourth couple, officials from the state Attorney General's Office said Monday.

For two months, Christine and her husband waited for their baby.

She says she and her husband met Collins through a small, private Dearborn-based adoption agency in August.

"They felt like she was a real straight shooter," said Christine about the agency's assurances. "We liked her. She seemed sincere."

Collins, she said, told them the baby was due around Oct. 10, though it was expected to arrive early. The baby was born in August, five days after they met, Christine said. Meanwhile, as they waited for the scheduled due date, she and her husband paid \$6,000 to the agency, most of which was paid to Collins for rent, utility and cell phone bills.

Collins received money from the three couples, each of whom had been matched with her for adoption, officials said.

Michigan Attorney General Mike Cox called it "despicable ... one of the lowest forms of fraud."

Adoption experts said it is also, fortunately, a rare form of fraud in Michigan.

Cox spokesman Matt Frendewey said the child, now in the custody of the fourth couple, was born in Dearborn in August. He declined to identify any of the prospective parents or agencies with whom they worked, citing the confidentiality of adoption proceedings. They were identified in the court complaint by their initials only.

The attorney general became involved after the child was born and one of the couples called for advice, Frendewey said.

"The best advice for prospective parents is to proceed with caution when looking at adopting a child and to understand there are unfortunately people like the defendant who have other agendas," he said.

"A woman who plans to give up her baby for adoption may legitimately decide to change

adoption agencies or families," Jane Weaver, director of Morning Star Adoption Center in Southfield, said Monday. But in such instances, the new agency usually wants written proof that she's fired her previous attorney or service provider, she said.

There is, however, no way for an agency to verify that a pregnant woman has not entered into agreements with multiple agencies and couples until, of course, the child is born.

And birth mothers can lawfully change their minds up until the adoption is completed, usually within a few weeks of the birth, and the expectant families have no recourse, Weaver explained.

"You can't say, 'Give me your child because I paid your rent for four months,' " she added.

Collins was charged with two felonies and released on \$20,000 bond after her arraignment in 27th District Court. A preliminary exam is scheduled for Feb. 22.

Christine said she and her husband were "easy prey" for Collins and vulnerable like a lot of prospective adoptive parents. For her family and other families, she warns, this type of fraud is likely more common than rare.

"It's not just a 'Dateline' story," she said. "There's no love lost with Heather."

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February 13, 2007

One baby, 4 adoptive couples

Wyandotte woman charged with felony; police say she used pregnancy to scam money from 3 families.

Iveory Perkins and Oralandar Brand-Williams / The Detroit News

WYANDOTTE -- A 33-year-old woman is accused of using her then-unborn baby to scam money from three unsuspecting couples eager to adopt her child, authorities say.

Heather Roshelle Collins of Wyandotte allegedly made arrangements with four adoption agencies to receive money for her living expenses in exchange for giving up her child to one of their clients.

The problem was that there was only one child and four couples who planned on adopting the baby.

Collins was charged Monday with two counts of obtaining money in excess of \$1,000 under false pretenses. She faces up to five years in prison on the felony charges.

"Using an unborn baby to defraud parents is despicable," said Attorney General Mike Cox in a statement. "My office will bring the full weight of the law to bear in this case."

Authorities claim money was the primary motive for Collins' actions. The prospective adoptive couples allegedly paid Collins' rent, car payments, cell phone bills and other living expenses.

Cox said Collins was sending her bills to all the couples and often being paid twice for the same expense. Authorities haven't disclosed how much money the couples paid out.

One of the prospective adoptive moms, Christina, 37, who lives in Metro Detroit but did not want her last name or city identified, said she and her husband were duped by Collins' "lies upon lies."

She said Collins' strategy appeared to be to string them along from August to October when, "in reality, she had the baby five days after we met up."

"She strung us along," said Christina. "She played us."

The couple paid Collins \$3,000, plus \$3,000 to the adoption agency, Christina said. They met Collins through a Dearborn-based adoption agency.

"We were paying her rent for a couple of months as well as a large utility bill."

In December, they adopted an infant. "It still doesn't take the sting out of being victimized," she said. "I just don't want (Collins) to walk away unpunished and have a good laugh on us."

Privacy laws that protect adopted children and their families prevent adoption agencies from sharing information with one another, said Matt Frendeway, a spokesman for the Attorney General's Office.

"We found no evidence that the agencies were involved in any fraud," Frendeway said. "Adoption agencies don't have the ability to communicate back and forth."

Collins ultimately gave up her child to another couple, but allegedly continued to accept money from the other three couples.

Michigan State Police officers arrested Collins at her home Monday. She was arraigned in 27th District Court before Judge Randy Kalmbach. Her bond was set at \$20,000, and a preliminary exam is set for Feb. 22.

"This case of fraud is particularly devastating because it victimized families who desired nothing more than to welcome a child into their home," said Michigan State Police Director Peter Munoz.

Anna Layne has never met Collins, but has received a lot of knocks on her door recently from people seeking her.

Layne lives in the home that Collins rented out two years ago.

"I have people coming to my house looking for her, the police have been here for her and three guys knocked on my door recently asking for her," Layne said. "I don't know where she is."

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Officials: Unborn Baby Used To Defraud Adoptive Parents

Three Sets Of Parents Promised Baby

POSTED: 12:43 pm EST February 12, 2007

UPDATED: 7:50 pm EST February 12, 2007

WYANDOTTE, Mich. -- A Wyandotte mother was arrested for using her unborn child to defraud several prospective adoptive parents.

Attorney General Mike Cox said Heather Roshelle Collins, 33, was working with as many as four different private adoption agencies seeking prospective adoptive parents.

The parents would pay her living expenses under the premise that, in return, she would offer her child to the parents for adoption.

"Using an unborn baby to defraud parents is despicable," said Cox. "This is one of the lowest forms of fraud, and my office will bring the full weight of the law to bear in this case."

Over the course of 2006, she was matched with three sets of prospective adoptive parents, none of whom were aware of the others, investigators said.

According to Cox, these prospective parents paid rent, car payments, and cell phone expenses for Collins.

In some instances, Collins received payment from two different sets of prospective parents for the same expenses, according to police.

Collins is alleged to have continued to accept payment from prospective parents even after she had given birth and turned the child over to another family for adoption.

"This case of fraud is particularly devastating because it victimized families who desired nothing more than to welcome a child into their home," said Colonel Peter C. Munoz, Director of the Michigan State Police. "Although the true impact of this crime is emotional the Michigan State Police hope this arrest will help bring these families some closure."

Collins was arraigned in 27th District Court, before Judge Randy L. Kalmbach, on two counts of obtaining money in excess of \$1,000 under false pretenses, a felony punishable by up to five years.

Kalmbach set bond at \$20,000, and Collins will be back in court for a preliminary exam scheduled for Feb. 22.

For more information on adoption, visit the [Web site for the Morning Star Adoption Center](#) in Southfield.

RELATED TO STORY



Video: Wyandotte Woman Charged With Adoption Fraud

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Bill would allow GPS alarm system in domestic violence cases

2/12/2007, 5:40 p.m. ET

By TIM MARTIN
The Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — Michigan judges would be allowed to require those charged with domestic violence to wear GPS devices that send alarms to their accusers under legislation planned by a Republican state lawmaker.

The measure would give domestic violence victims a warning system to alert them when their potential attackers are nearby, said Rep. Bill Caul, R-Mount Pleasant. Caul said the need for more protections was highlighted by a recent Isabella County case where a man was charged with the shooting death of his estranged wife.

Mary Babb was shot to death last month outside the offices of the Morning Sun newspaper in Mount Pleasant. Her husband, Thomas Daniel Babb, has been charged with murder in the case.

Police said Mary Babb had obtained a personal protection order against Thomas Babb. He was free on bond after being charged with beating and sexually assaulting his wife.

Caul said the case is evidence that personal protection orders and pending charges aren't strong enough deterrents in some cases.

"This is designed as another tool to help protect victims of domestic violence," Caul said. "Hopefully it would provide some comfort and peace of mind."

Spokespeople for Gov. Jennifer Granholm and House Democrats said Monday they will review the legislation when it is introduced.

The legislation would give judges discretion on whether to require defendants in domestic abuse cases to wear tethered global positioning system devices. It could be ordered as a condition of bail while they await trial, Caul said.

The device would be calibrated to send an alarm when they got within a certain distance of the victim, who would carry a small receiver for the signal. Caul said that could give victims time to call the police or seek other help.

It was unclear Monday how much the system would cost, but Caul said the defendants in cases where the technology was ordered would be expected to pay for it.

A recent law passed in Massachusetts allows judges to order GPS tracking in cases where domestic abusers have violated existing restraining orders.

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Domestic Violence Bill Introduced

MIRS, Monday, February 12, 2007

Domestic violence victims will be alerted by a beeper when their abuser gets near them if legislation requiring abusers to wear GPS tracking systems is passed.

The victim would carry a beeper and would be automatically alerted when their attacker gets within a certain distance.



Daycare association increases skills, accountability

Friday, February 12, 2007

Not all the news about daycare these days is bad. Although incidents of abuse and neglect dominate the news, good providers are finding ways to increase their skills and their accountability to parents and each other.

A group of providers in Hudsonville, Jenison, Grandville, and Wyoming is inviting all day care providers to learn how they can make the news about daycare even better.

Kids Circle of Care is "a network of home and group child care providers dedicated to improving child care standards and bringing professionalism to the home child care setting," according to the group's statement of purpose.

Cheryl Hytinen, of Jenison, said the aim of the association is to help all day care providers improve their skills, and gain educational credits required for state licensing through training events and hearing speakers.

Some areas of education and discussion focus on child development, safety and well-being; community connections to expand children's experiences through field trips; developing a support system of child care professionals to "encourage one another and share ideas and concerns," and to have a network of trained providers to which clients can be referred.

Nancy Strengtholt, who has been associated with the group since its beginning several years ago, said topics of education have included shaken baby syndrome, car seat safety, CPR refresher classes, and handling taxes.

Getting to know other providers and the children they care for provides a back-up system for both caregivers and parents if a need develops to place children in a new setting, Strengtholt said.

As for parents like Kris Prisecaru, knowing that providers care enough about their children to go the extra mile in educating themselves is a comfort.

"The more they know, the better it is," said Prisecaru, who has been bringing children to Hytinen's center for six years.

Hytinen said new members are always welcome, and there is no cost for membership. There are no officers or governing body. Members share planning responsibilities for one meeting or activity within a calendar year, a field trip, training session or other meeting. Provision is made for those who would like to participate in training events, but do not want to be active in planning activities for the group. Meetings usually are held in members' homes.

Hytinen said the group not only provides training hours to meet the state requirements for childcare providers, "but some terrific friendships can be made along the way."

For information about Kids Circle of Caring, call Hytinen at 667-8620.

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The Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA)

MIRS, Monday, February 12, 2007

One of the more successful programs in state government, MSHDA is run more like a financing agency than a state agency. Charged with helping low-income people receive financing for homeownership, MSHDA has become one of the bigger success stories in state government.

But when you're successful, everybody wants a piece of you. For example, when the Michigan Broadband Development Authority was getting off the ground, MSHDA was called upon to prop up the broadband people with some financing.

At the close of MSHDA's most recent fiscal year on June 30, the agency reported a \$620 million balance, with \$265 million restricted for specific bond repayments and the rest (\$355 million) being an unrestricted fund balance. The amount, however, is part of the full faith and credit that backs all MSHDA bonds.

Rep. Jack **BRANDENBURG** (R-Harrison Twp.), the ranking Republican on the House appropriations subcommittee that oversees the Department of Labor and Economic Growth (DLEG) said the money should be on the table for discussion.

"I don't mean we have to stop lending money forever, but can we afford this program at this time?" he asked. "The question has to be asked, 'Can government be in this business considering the type of asset balance it has and the type of fiscal situation we're in?'"

Sen. Valde **GARCIA** (R-Howell), who chaired the Senate DLEG Appropriations Subcommittee the last four years, said he looked at the MSHDA money in the past, but shied away after questions arose about the state of Michigan's access to the money.

Of the \$355 million in unrestricted funds, \$235 million is related to loans from developers and \$56 million is related to grants. The remaining \$64 million in actual "liquid cash," which MSHDA uses to support its operating expenditures.

MSHDA Chief Accountant Jeffrey **SYKES** said if the state found a way to take money from MSHDA to balance the General Fund, Wall Street would consider it a raid and that would hurt the agency's financial rating. Even if the amount was considered relatively small, Sykes said Wall Street would take the attitude that if the state did it once, they'd do it again.

"This is all we have," Sykes said. "It's like a 401k account. That money earns money for you. If it's taken, we wouldn't have any money to operate."



Muskegon Chronicle

Spike in county residents' needs doesn't end with food stamps

Tuesday, February 13, 2007

By Federico Martinez

CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

An increasing number of Muskegon County residents are needing help to make ends meet -- and it's not just food stamps they are seeking.

The number of county residents receiving government assistance of many kinds -- food stamps, child day care, and medical and cash assistance -- grew from 31,798 in November 2002 to 40,738 in December 2006, according to Michigan Department of Human Services records.

"It's such a relenting increase," said Jane Johnson, executive director of the Muskegon County Department of Human Services.

Especially alarming is that most people who are asking for help have jobs -- they just aren't making enough money to live on, Johnson said.

She said 2,839 people received cash assistance in December -- 435 more cases than four years ago. The number of people receiving food stamps has increased from 9,282 to 14,646 during the same four-year period, she said.

"Economically, people are having challenges -- although most of them are working," Johnson said.

What's happening in Muskegon County is a reflection of conditions statewide, she said.

Approximately 1.9 million Michigan residents are receiving government food assistance, the highest number here in the more than 40-year history of the federal food stamp program.

There's no doubt that the economy locally and statewide has a direct effect on the level of people's needs, Johnson said.

"We try to process their needs as quickly as possible -- which has put a bigger demand on our staff," Johnson said.

Those pressures are expected to ease beginning this week when the local DHS receives 12 new employees. The employees are part of a state pilot project designed to help local agencies develop better training and support programs for clients, Johnson said.

DHS and other Muskegon agencies and organizations -- churches, homeless shelters and food pantries -- have also had to collaborate more to make sure people's needs are being met, she said.

"There's not a single agency that can provide all of the services when you have this many families," Johnson said.

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